

Pictures of Mona

by Jordan Eash

Jersey's ex-girlfriend calls him on a Saturday in the fall and asks if he'll help her find her cat. She says it ran off on her while she was taking it for a walk in the park.

He thinks for a second about asking her why she was taking a cat for a walk in the first place.

But he doesn't—he just says okay.

Besides, he's got a more important question for her, which is where the hell has she been for two years, exactly?
Can we not talk about that?

They wander through the park checking trees and bushes and storm drains for any sign of the cat.

Jersey says she can't really blame him for asking. After all, she was the one who broke up with him right before she vanished—literally, as far as he knew—off the face of the earth. She didn't have any family he could ask either, she being "the girl from nowhere," as he used to call her. He says she owes him at least some explanation. He thought she died. He even thought about going to the police, except if she really was dead he would have been the prime suspect—

She cuts off his rambling just as it starts. *I was traveling, she says. Overseas. I just had to get away for a while.*
You could have left a note!

It wasn't that simple, she says.
What's that supposed to mean?

I said can we not talk about it?

About fifteen minutes later she calls off the cat hunt. She says it's useless. *He's long gone by now, if he existed at all in the first place.*
What?

Hey—do you want to go to the beach?

It's like forty degrees out.

So? she says. *We've got jackets. Let's go to the beach! Come on!*

The sky over the lake is gray, and the lake's gray too. Sleepy little waves brush over the sand. It's like the cold makes everything tired.

It doesn't seem to bother Jersey's ex though. She wades out a little ways and stares straight down into the water. She wears these red rubber boots that go up to her knees.

She asks if he knows *The Little Mermaid*. The story, not the Disney movie. She says she hates it, that there's a lot going on under the sea, but nothing like in that story.

Another weird thing to say, Jersey thinks. *The Little Mermaid* was her favorite back when they were together, and he says so.

No! she says. *I've always hated it. Other stories too... They're all lies!* She gets quiet for a second, then says, *Art too. Except Rothko. His paintings aren't lies—they're just colors.*

Rothko?

Yeah, she says, *the abstract expressionist. Big rectangles of—* Jersey says he knows who Rothko is. He just doesn't get why—

I saw God in a Rothko painting, she says, *in Chicago, at the Art Institute.*

Then she turns around and stomps off toward the dry sand. Her scarf comes undone. It unfurls and hangs loose and unfurls some more, like it wants to drag itself through the mud. She looks like she might stomp all the way back to town, and from there... Who knows?

So Jersey pulls his phone out of his back pocket.

Hey, he says, *turn around.*

She does. She frowns. *Don't take my picture,* she says. *Pictures steal your soul away. They try to capture you, but they can't—they're just flat.*

I know, Jersey says, snapping a photo. *But it's the only way.*

